

The Random Jottings of Donald Jay from Nelson in Pendle.

In the small village of Barrowford, nestled among rolling hills and meandering streams, there lived an eccentric old man named Robert Bannister. Known to all as the village dentist, he was the only person brave enough to take on the task of extracting teeth in those days. His humble abode stood beside the local inn, whimsically named the "Gaumless."

One day, a young boy named Joseph Dyson found himself in desperate need of dental assistance.

A throbbing toothache had plagued him for days, and the time had come to face the dreaded dentist. With trepidation in his heart, Joseph ventured into Bannister's modest dental office.

The interior was dimly lit, and the air was heavy with the scent of medicinal herbs. As Joseph approached the dentist's chair, he noticed Bannister's peculiar request. "Sit on the floor," the old man said with a crooked grin. Perplexed but obedient, Joseph obliged, positioning himself on the worn-out wooden floor.

Bannister, a man of unconventional methods, positioned himself beside the boy, tucking his head between his legs. From a pocket within his faded vest, he pulled out a fearsome-looking instrument wrapped in a worn, red handkerchief. It appeared more like a relic from a medieval torture chamber than a dental tool.

With determination etched on his weathered face, Bannister proceeded to work. The struggle was strenuous and painful as he battled against the resistant tooth. Joseph winced and gritted his teeth, gripping the edges of his trousers tightly. Finally, with one last exertion, the tooth was freed from its stubborn hold.

The boy let out a sigh of relief mingled with a whimper of pain. Bannister, observing the discomfort etched across Joseph's face, couldn't help but feel a tinge of guilt. "I think I have hurt thee, lad," he confessed, his voice filled with concern. "Tha' can have th' twopence back."

Despite his unorthodox methods and gruff demeanor, Robert Bannister possessed a kind heart. He cared for the well-being of his patients, even if his methods were unconventional. The act of returning the twopence fee was a testament to his genuine concern for Joseph's well-being. Word of Bannister's unique dental practice spread throughout Barrowford, captivating the villagers with both awe and curiosity. Patients would recount tales of sitting on the floor or standing awkwardly, depending on the position of the troublesome tooth. In particularly stubborn cases, heads between legs became the norm.

As the years passed, Barrowford underwent numerous changes. Modern dentistry arrived, rendering Bannister's archaic methods obsolete. The old dentist reluctantly retired, passing the torch to a younger, more scientifically inclined generation.

Though the memories of Bannister's unconventional dental practice faded, the village never forgot the eccentric old man who extracted teeth with determination and care. And if you were to stroll through the streets of Barrowford today, you might hear a few elderly villagers reminiscing about the days when dental appointments involved sitting on the floor or getting their heads between Bannister's legs, wrapped in a red handkerchief.

For it was in those moments, in that small village, that Robert Bannister left his mark as a dedicated dentist, whose unorthodox methods and genuine concern became part of the folklore of Barrowford—a testament to the resilience and ingenuity of a bygone era.

By Donald Jay